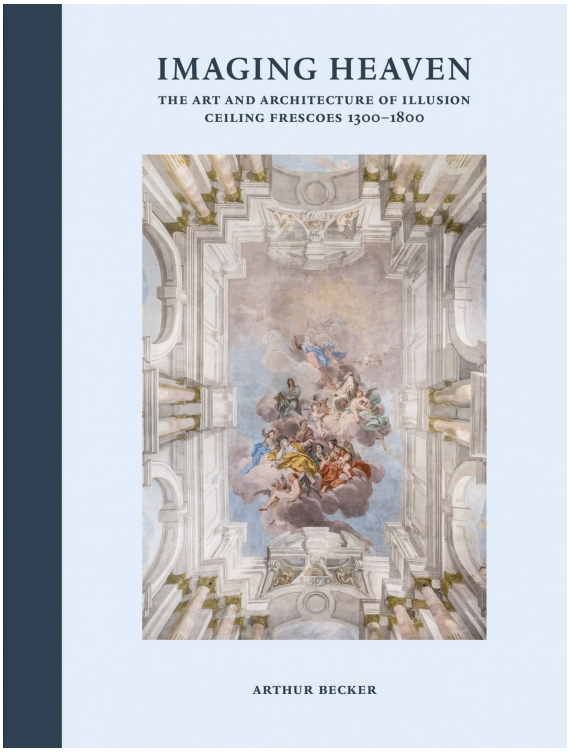
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Imaging Heaven: The Art and Architecture of Illusion

Ceiling Frescoes 1300-1800

Arthur Becker

Dan Sherer

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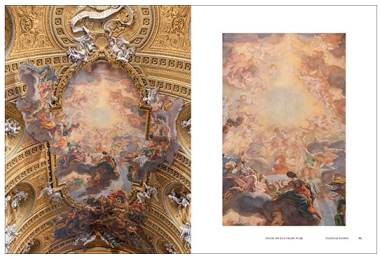
- Three centuries of illusionist celestial realms, documented here, demonstrate a continuity in the public desire to still be enthralled by ever changing visual conditions
- An immersive exploration of the illusionistic ceiling frescoes that emerged out of Italy and expanded into Catholic Europe, the book traces the evolution of a stylistic mode defined by its embodiment of the diametrical opposition between illusion and reality
- Italian Art – Correggio, Caravaggio, Gaulli, Pozzo, Tiepolo

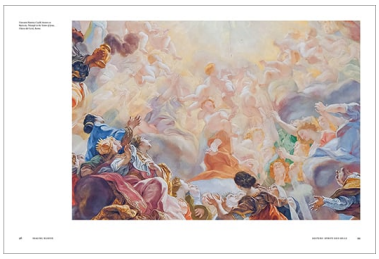
Imaging Heaven is a visual narrative of frescoed church ceilings, photographed across Italy and Catholic Europe. Moving from the Proto-Renaissance to the Baroque, the book follows painters as they confront a fundamental problem: how to make the unseen realm of heaven perceptible amid profound shifts in cosmology, theology, and science.

Guided by threads of light, gesture, and illusion, the photographs reveal how painters moved from shadowless gold grounds rooted in Byzantine techniques to radiant, sophisticated illumination; turned hieratic icons into anatomically precise, emotionally charged bodies; and dissolved architectural boundaries with a photographic study of *trompe-l'oeil, quadratura,* and *di sotto in sù* effects that open ceilings onto boundless celestial space. Works by artists such as Correggio, Pozzo, and Tiepolo mark key moments in this ascent to Baroque theatricality.

Imaging Heaven situates these painted heavens within wider intellectual shifts—from Aristotelian and Ptolemaic cosmology to Copernican and Galilean discoveries, and from Reformation turmoil to Counter-Reformation efforts to move and persuade believers. In this expanded universe, ceiling frescoes relocate the hierarchical cosmos onto church vaults, transforming churches into sacred theaters where radiant light, illusionistic depth, and emotionally expressive figures create immersive and engaging encounters with the divine, turning an upward glance into an experience of transcendence.

Arthur Becker returned to creating art late in his business career. At this time, his work investigated cultural materialism and the connection of pop culture symbols of money and status to contemporary social values. While his commitment to photography had been ongoing since his undergraduate training, the themes explored in Imaging Heaven first emerged during an incidental visit to Rome, where he encountered the *quadratura* "faux Pantheon" dome in the Jesuit church of Sant'Ignazio. Since then, Becker has embarked on a sustained photographic project documenting both familiar and more obscure ceiling paintings in churches and other buildings across Italy and Catholic Europe, the results of which form the core of *Imaging Heaven.* **Dr. Daniel Sherer** (PhD, Harvard University, 2000) teaches architectural history and theory at Princeton University School of Architecture (SoA). His areas of research include Italian Renaissance and Baroque architecture; modern architecture in Europe and the United States; modern receptions of humanist architecture; Italian modern architecture and its interactions with art and design; modern architecture and film; and historiography and theory, with an emphasis on Manfredo Tafuri. His translation of Tafuri's *Ricerca del Rinascimento: principi, città, architetti* (Turino: Einaudi, 1992), which was published in English as *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), won the Sir Nikolaus Pevsner Book Award. He has published widely in European and American journals including *AA Files, Artforum, Art Journal, Assemblage, Domus, Journal of Architecture, JSAH, Log, Perspecta, Potlatch, Studi e Ricerche di storia dell'architettura, Vesper* and *Zodiac.* In 2018 he curated the exhibition *Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City,* at Princeton SoA. In 2022–23, he was Visiting Professor in Architectural History and Theory in the Dipartimento di Culture del Progetto, Iuav University of Venice. He is the 2026 Visiting Professor in the Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani, Politecnico di Milano.







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